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INVESTIGATIONS

Contractor Submitted False Radiation Data at Hunters Point

In an internal report uncovered by the Investigative Unit, Tetra Tech says it provided the Navy false soil samples while working on the radiological cleanup of the Hunters Point shipyard

By Vicky Nguyen, Liz Wagner and Felipe Escamilla

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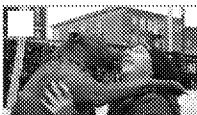
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A Navy contractor in charge of remediating radiological contamination at Hunters Point in San Francisco admits in an internal April 2014 report that it submitted false soil sample data, claiming areas of the shipyard were free of radiation when they may not have been. Vicky Nguyen reports in a story that aired on October 13, 2014. (Published Monday, Oct 13, 2014)

Updated at 11:44 PM PDT on Monday, Oct 13, 2014

A Navy contractor tasked with cleaning radioactive soil at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco admitted in an internal report obtained exclusively by the NBC Bay Area Investigative Unit that it mishandled soil samples and submitted false data.

Tetra Tech, a multinational engineering, construction and environmental corporation details in an April 2014 report how it was caught submitting false soil samples to the Navy in an apparent effort to declare the soil free of radiological contamination when it may not have been. The Pasadena-based company is a



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WEATHER FORECAST

\$2.7 billion per year business that has won more than \$300 million worth of contracts for cleanup work at Hunters Point.

Hunters Point is an 866-acre piece of waterfront property in the southeast portion of San Francisco that is slated to become one of the largest urban housing, retail and recreational developments in the nation. Development giant Lennar Corporation recently began selling the first batch of condominiums at Hunters Point for move-in this winter. But the shipyard is also a federal superfund site contaminated with petroleum fuels, pesticides and volatile organic compounds, as well as radiological material from a nuclear research lab that included radiation experiments and the decontamination of warships.

The internal Tetra Tech report adds to mounting concerns that the remediation of the shipyard has been botched and that the health of future residents is at risk.

• Former Contractors Claim Hunters Point Cleanup is Botched

"These members of the general public could be exposed to contaminants that are not supposed to be there—unknowingly," said Bert Bowers, a radiological safety consultant who worked for Tetra Tech at Hunters Point in 2010 and 2011.

According to the report, in October 2012 the Navy determined that soil sample results were inconsistent with results from previous samples collected in the same area. The real samples were supposed to come from the soil beneath a former lab used to conduct radiation tests on animals. Tetra Tech's own investigation found that the soil was actually "collected from locations different than the ones specified"—areas that had already tested clean for radiological contamination.

"Basically it was faked," Bowers said. "They basically collected a false sample and analyzed it and put a report out that had false results."

Tetra Tech states that it retested 12 additional areas on Parcels C and E, portions of the shipyard where soil samples may have been misrepresented. The report reveals that when Tetra Tech tested the locations again, it discovered that some had elevated levels of radiological contamination. The contractor subsequently remediated those locations.

"If the Navy had not caught this," Bowers said, "there would be very, very high levels of contaminated soil, radioactive soil in the ground, where the plans are in place to build homes for the general public to live in, with yards for children to play in."

Bowers is one of four radiation specialists who blew the whistle on Tetra Tech's practices and are now suing the company for retaliation, claiming they were fired after questioning the company's actions. Bowers first spoke with the Investigative Unit earlier this year saying the cleanup of Hunters Point had been compromised and that Tetra Tech cut corners on safety to save money.

Many other people including Ahimsa Sumchai, a former member of the Hunters Point Restoration Advisory Board (RAB), have questioned the \$1 billion, two-decade long cleanup of the shipyard.

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Inconsistent Samples (pg 3)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2012 the Navy determined that soil samples results were inconsistent with results from previous samples collected in the same area. The real samples were supposed to come from the soil beneath a former lab used to conduct radiation tests on animals. Tetra Tech E Inc. (TTEC) in response to a Navy inquiry into discrepancies between the first two sets of own investigation found that the soil was actually collected from locations different than the ones specified. Those locations had already been cleared of radioactive contaminants.

Retesting (pg 19)

Tetra Tech states that it retested 12 additional areas on Parcels C and E, portions of the shipyard where soil samples may have been misrepresented. The report reveals that when Tetra Tech tested the locations again, it discovered that some had elevated levels of radiological contamination.

Explanation (pg 28)

• **Hypothesis: Can Sample Results in Question Be Replicated?**

◦ Samples collected during the investigation fail to yield results that match the Tetra Tech came up with multiple theories, but could not definitively conclude how or why of the samples were falsified. In the report, the company states that the only possible explanation is that sample collectors took samples in areas outside of designated survey locations.

• **Hypothesis: Does Visual Inspection and Comparison Show Soil Homogeneity?**

- Visual inspection of the survey units in question shows a wide variety of soil types, such that a consistent concentration of naturally occurring radioactive materials within an individual survey unit is unlikely.
- Visual inspection of the anomalous soil samples as compared to other soil samples collected in the area shows a homogeneity in the anomalous soil samples that is not produced in any other soil sample collected within the area.

• **Hypothesis: Did Inappropriate Sampling Techniques Result in Discrepancies?**

"This is huge," Sumchai said after reviewing the report. "This is a very, very big incident. In the over 10 years that I have been working with the shipyard cleanup issues, this is one of the biggest."

For years she has fought for more action from the Navy, and from regulators who have monitored the remediation of Hunters Point. She called upon the California Department of Public Health, which oversees the radiological operations at Hunters Point, to "make a statement about the health and safety impacts" of the actions detailed in Tetra Tech's own report.

Stephen Woods, the radiation safety chief for the state health department told the Investigative Unit in May that he would grant an interview request to discuss the Tetra Tech report. The agency has since changed its mind, instead saying that the department "will not be officially commenting."

The Department of Toxic Substances Control, the lead state agency on the project, has also remained silent. In an email to NBC Bay Area a department representative wrote "we have no comment on the report."

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the federal agency in charge of licensing Tetra Tech, said in an email that it is aware of soil issues at Hunters Point but that it hasn't taken any enforcement action against the company as a result of the false samples.

Sumchai said the regulatory agencies cannot ignore these events.

"You can't bury anything like this, it's too big," Sumchai said. "There are too many people involved. It raises too many issues about other incidents."

- **Workers Say Hunters Point Dirt Needs Radiation Screening**

Tetra Tech's cleanup of Hunters Point continues, and just last month the company won two more contracts totaling \$7.5 million for work at the site.

Tetra Tech declined multiple requests for comment, but in the report blamed sample collectors for the false samples that were submitted to the Navy. After completing its investigation, Tetra Tech came up with multiple theories but could not conclude how or why the samples were falsified.

The company disciplined two supervisors, retrained workers on how to properly collect soil samples and conducted ethical training for employees. Tetra Tech said that after issuing the corrective action, the company "has not had a recurrence" of false samples "indicating that the corrective actions have addressed the problem."

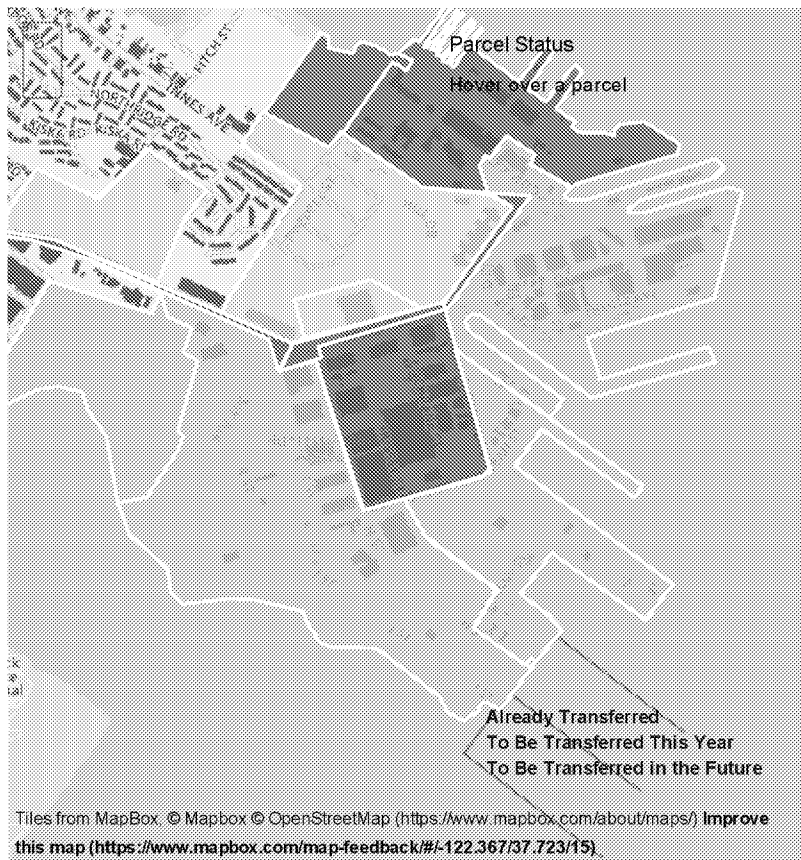
The Navy also declined an on-camera interview request but said it will continue to evaluate all current and historic data collected by Tetra Tech, acknowledging that the event calls into question the quality of data provided by the contractor in the past. In an email the Navy said it is "committed to ensuring that all reports contain accurate and defensible data."

If you have a tip for the Investigative Unit email theunit@nbcbayarea.com or call 888-996-TIPS.

Hunters Point

The decommissioned Hunters Point Naval Shipyard includes a federal superfund site that includes about 800 acres of land and water. For years, the Navy has been decontaminating the site for eventual transfer to the city of San Francisco. The area is divided into parcels, most of which have not yet been fully cleaned and transferred.

Map by Scott Pham (<http://www.twitter.com/scottpham>). Parcel boundaries are necessarily approximate. More information at the EPA (<http://yosemite.epa.gov/r9/sfund/r9sfdocw.nsf/vwsoalphabetic/Hunters+Point+Naval+Shipyard> OpenDocument).



Published at 12:35 PM PDT on Oct 13, 2014

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Patrick Killeen · Amos Alonzo Stagg High School

I would like to talk to someone, my dear friend Vlada Riichsoovich was a artist who rented a studio space at Hunters point, as many artist he spent a lot of time in his studio and died of sudden pancreatic cancer which came on very quickly in 2009 he died in 2010 at age 49. I always thought the contamination had a lot to do with this. I would like this story to be known.

Reply · Like · 2 · Follow Post · October 13, 2014 at 11:56pm

david1717 (signed in using yahoo)

I am one of the attorneys working on the Hunters Point issue with the 4 people who objected to the false remediation. Send me a note at davidantonlaw@gmail.com directly about your friend.

Reply · Like · October 14, 2014 at 9:10am

david1717 (signed in using yahoo)

Good work NBC. This is just the tip of the radiative iceberg at HP. We should all be concerned that development will happen at HP, and people for decades will get sick and die from radioactive contamination that the government paid to get cleaned up, and is not cleaned up. Tetra Tech's conduct is an example of putting a desire for high profits ahead of doing the job right and in the end putting the health and safety of others at risk for these profits. A modern example of blood money.

Reply · Like · Follow Post · October 14, 2014 at 9:32am



Lisa Hawks · Top Commenter · None

they should have fired Tetra Tech and they have extra contracts...I wouldn't trust them now

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